Flawless and Effective Storage of Ammunitions

503. SHRI RAVI SHANKAR PRASAD: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the frequent spurt of fires in ammunition depots in Bharatpur, Birdhwal, Pathankot and many other places have revealed that our defence planners concentrated more on modernisation of weapon systems and contemptuously ignored the safety standards of ammunition depots and the existing storage regulation are being regrettable observed more in breach; and

(b) if so, whether Government propose to appoint any authority to frame fresh regulation for flawless and effective storage system?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) and (b) Safety standards and storage regulations as enumerated in various orders are being strictly implemented. This process is being regularly checked by functionaries at all levels. However, there is a need to update store houses to store ammunition since some quantity of ammunition is stored on linths in the open. The necessary allotment of funds has been made and by 2004 all ammunition would be under proper storage in Explosive Stores Houses.

The present system is adequate and there is no proposal to appoint any other Authority to frame fresh regulations for this purpose.

Fire in Cochin Shipyard Ltd.

504. PROF. A. LAKSHMISAGAR: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether a fire broke out recently in a support vessel of the Indian Navy's submarine undergoing major overhaul in the Cochin Shipyard Limited killing some persons;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) what is the outcome of the inquiry conducted by Government into the incident stating whether any sabotage is suspected; and

(d) the action taken by Government in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a)Yes, Sir.

(b) The fire broke out on 26th May, 2001 at 1430 hours onboard INS Amba, submarine depot ship, undergoing refit at Cochin Shipyard Ltd. Two non-defence civilians were killed. Prima facie it is believed that the dhobi onboard ship, directly requested one of the welders from the shipyard to undertake some welding jobs for fixing a bracket in his compartment. This was done ignoring the safety norms for welding activities on ship. The stationery stores in the adjoining cabin probably caught fire through conduction of heat due to high temperature. The dhobi is believed to have been suffocated and died, on the spot whereas his assistant standing near him succumbed reaching the hospital.

(c) and (d) Inquiry in this matter has since been ordered and it is in progress. The existing rules provide for prevention of such eventualities and the enforcements of these rules has been emphasized. Preventive measures are reviewed from time to time for strict enforcement to avoid such happenings.

Expenditure on Arms, Equipments and Weapons

505. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government would spend a staggering US$ 95 billion on arms, equipments and weapons during the next 15 years;

(b) whether out of this, US$ 20 billion would be on the development of its nuclear weapons, command and control structure; and

(c) if so, whether Government have assessed the impact of this on our plans to alleviate poverty from the country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI KRISHNAM RAJU): (a) Government has not made any long-term planning of spending a staggering US$ 95 billion on arms, equipments and weapons during the next 15 years.

(b) Does not arise.

(c) No occasion has arisen to make such an assessment.

Purchase of AJT Hawk Aircraft

506. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government have decided to abandon its plan to purchase AJT Hawk Aircraft after over ten years of negotiation and go for the Russian MIG-AT;